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SUBJECT: AIVD REPORT...

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SUBJECT: AIVD REPORT ON EMERGING TRENDS IN RADICALIZATION  
AND VIOLENT JIHAD IN THE NETHERLANDS

1. (U) SUMMARY. The AIVD, the Dutch civilian intelligence service, issued a report March 30 on the terrorist threat in the Netherlands, entitled "'Violent Jihad in the Netherlands: Current Trends in the Islamist Terrorist Threat.'" The report concludes that the terrorist threat in the Netherlands now comes primarily from decentralized local networks based in the country, and that a process of "'autonomous radicalization,'" primarily through the Internet, is replacing top-down recruitment by charismatic leaders as the principal source of radicalization and incitement to violent action.

2. (U) A trend toward "'virtualization of jihad,'" in which extremist groups use the Internet to spread the ideology of violent Jihad, maintain contacts, and obtain training is also noted. The report highlights an increasingly prominent role played by radicalized young women and Dutch converts among extremist groups in the Netherlands. The report argues that countering the terrorist threat requires a wellbalanced, comprehensive effort that promotes integration, encourages the Islamic community to resist radicalization, and represses terrorist groups. End Summary.

3. (U) The report is part of a periodic series of AIVD reports on terrorist trends. The full text has been emailed

to EUR/UBI, S/CT and INR. "Violent Jihad" examines four trends in Islamic terrorism in Europe and the specific situation in the Netherlands. The trends identified are: a shift from external foreign terrorist threat to an indigenous, or home-grown, terrorism, which the AIVD terms "European jihad;" a top-down process of decentralization and local implantation of jihadist networks; an "opposing but complementary" grass-roots process of radicalization and emergence of local jihadist networks; and the "virtualization of jihad," in which the Internet has become the primary mechanism for dissemination of radical Islam and recruitment for Jihad.

¶4. (U) In the Netherlands the principal terrorist threat is now from decentralized local networks based in the Netherlands. These groups are comprised primarily of young Dutch Moroccans between 15 and 25 years old, often of Berber background, who are seeking their identity and status in Dutch society. The recruitment and radicalization of young Muslims born and bred in the Netherlands takes place principally through the Internet. "Top down" recruitment by charismatic leaders in mosques has largely been replaced by "bottom up" radicalization by groups of youths who discover radical Islam together, and incite each other to join the armed struggle. The AIVD refers to this phenomenon as "autonomous radicalization."

¶5. (U) According to the report, factors that play a role in radicalization and the willingness of young Dutch Muslims to use violence include frustration and dissatisfaction with their social position. They identify with neither the traditional Islamic culture of their parents nor secular Dutch society. Even relatively well-educated Dutch Moroccans are often dissatisfied with their place in society, in part as a result of discrimination and high rates of unemployment. Young second and third generation Dutch Muslims from other ethnic backgrounds are also seeking their identities within Dutch society, but undergo the process of radicalization to a significantly lesser extent than Dutch Moroccans. Radicalized young women are playing a more prominent and activist role in Jihad groups in the Netherlands than in other European countries. There is also a high profile group of Dutch converts to Islam among the radicalized networks. (COMMENT. Convicted Hofstad Group member Jason Walters is a dual national American Dutch convert. End COMMENT.)

¶6. (U) The attraction of radical Islam for Dutch Muslim youth has grown since the 2004 murder of Theo van Gogh. The report stresses, however, that most radicalized youth adhere to non-violent forms of political Islam; only a small minority join violent Jihad groups. Receptiveness to radicalization and readiness to engage in violent action, which the AIVD terms "jihadization," results from a combination of youths' fixation on "pure" Islam as described in extremist websites and chat rooms, and dissatisfaction with local and international political and social circumstances, such as perceived discrimination against Islam in the West and the war in Iraq.  
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¶7. (U) Jihad networks in the Netherlands are driven primarily by domestic political events and have a strong focus on Dutch socio-political issues. The report stresses that in contrast to local networks in other European countries, which tend to seek "soft" targets frequented by large numbers of civilians, Dutch groups tend to target individual politicians -- such as outspoken parliamentarians Aayan Hirsi Ali and Gert Wilders -- and opinion leaders they consider to be "enemies of Islam."

¶8. (U) The AIVD has identified 10 to 20 loosely organized Jihad networks in the Netherlands. The Hofstad Group is the best-known Dutch local network. A network may have a permanent core of one or two persons surrounded by a limited number of active supporters, but it can also consist of dozens of people around a changing core group. Most Jihad networks operating in the Netherlands are comprised of

European born individuals with Islamic backgrounds. Although these local groups often have contacts with other local and international groups, they are normally not controlled by external groups, but act instead on their own initiative in response to local developments.

¶9. (U) According to the AIVD, radicalization often develops into "jihadization" during small, informal discussions. Sometimes a charismatic leader plays a central role. For example, a Syrian preacher was initially the main inspiration for the Hofstad Group, though other group members, in particular van Gogh murderer Mohamed Bouyeri, also made ideological contributions to the radicalization process. Many local networks in the Netherlands are heavily influenced by "neo-Takfir" ideology, which the AIVD describes as a European adaptation of the extremist Takfir Wal Hijra ideology developed in Egypt in the 1960s. The relatively simplistic, often incoherent "neo-Takfir" ideology justifies the use of violence against nonbelievers. In addition, the report notes the evolution of a local Dutch variant on radical Islam; though it does not lead directly to violent action, it does appear to lower the threshold for advocating Jihad. The "neo-Takfir" networks are almost all interlinked to some extent, according to the report. Some individuals linked to local networks are planning to travel to Iraq or other conflict areas to join the Jihad there, but most are focused on conducting Jihad at home.

¶10. (U) In addition to these "home grown" groups, there are a number of locally established internationally oriented networks, which are controlled from abroad, or in which foreign recruiters living in the Netherlands play a key role. There are a limited number of transnational networks in the Netherlands, according to the AIVD. The report downplays the role of Al Qaeda as a "strategic mastermind" steering worldwide Jihad networks and preparing attacks, suggesting it has instead become a "brand name" and inspiration for decentralized Jihad networks that take action based on local conditions.

¶11. (U) The report raises the concern that the local networks will increasingly link up with international Jihadist elements. It states that the highest threat comes when the experience and methods of international networks are linked with the youthful enthusiasm for martyrdom of the local networks. There is some evidence that local networks in the Netherlands are going through a continuous learning process, and thus becoming more "professional." For example, the arrests and trials of Hofstad Group members have made them aware of police and AIVD strategy and tactics, and they have since displayed more sophistication in protecting their Internet communications.

¶12. (U) Moving from the specifics of the violent threat from Jihad networks to broader societal effects, the report stresses that radicalization not only raises the threat of terrorist attacks in the short term, but also jeopardizes social cohesion and solidarity in Dutch society, and ultimately poses a threat to the democratic order of the country. It posits that an effective counter-terrorism policy must be linked to promoting integration and mobilizing resistance within the Islamic community against radicalization, as well as the implementation of measures to prevent radicalization and repress terrorist individuals and networks.

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¶13. (U) The report concludes that the Jihad threat might diminish if the Netherlands succeeds in reversing the trend of radicalization and "Jihadization." To accomplish this, it stresses, it is crucial to achieve a balance between protecting citizens from terrorism and preventing unjustified anxiety and social polarization, particularly since the latter could stimulate further radicalization.

¶14. (SBU) Comment. The AIVD report provides a thoughtful review of developments in the terrorist threat in the

Netherlands. In documenting the social and psychological roots of the on-going processes of radicalization and receptiveness to violent Jihad among Dutch born Muslim youth, it makes clear, as AIVD Director van Hulst states in his foreword, that the terrorist threat is "increasingly rooted" in Dutch society. By highlighting the need for a strong effort to promote integration and avoid further polarization to counter the threat, the report makes a useful contribution to the on-going policy debate about how to respond effectively to the threat posed by "home-grown" Muslim extremists without demonizing all Muslims in the Netherlands. END COMMENT.  
BLAKEMAN